

SYNOPSIS - - - - - "DANGEROUS PATHS"

Story & scenario by Joseph H. Conrad
Directed by Duke Turner

RUTH HAMMOND is growing into beautiful young womanhood in a small drowsy country village. Her father, Noah Hammond, has married the second time and Deborah, his wife, is the proverbial shrew and the traditional ogreish stepmother. She makes life miserable for father and daughter.

The one bright spot in the sleepy little village where everybody minds everyone else's business is the little church and particularly its young pastor, John Emerson. Emerson has taken a fancy to Ruth and escorts her home from Sunday services until finally the mean stepmother interferes with the growing romance.

In the role of a mercenary matchmaker she has been striving to marry Ruth off to Silas Newton, smooth, oily, hypocritical member of the board of elders and the richest man in the village. His age and bald spot do not interfere with Deborah's plans. Ruth rejects the stepmother's attempt to marry her off and following a family quarrel decides to leave and go to the city to make her way alone.

In the city her efforts to obtain work are thwarted. She is forced out of her lodgings. Seeking refuge in the streets and overcome by fatigue and hunger, a painted and bedizened young woman who sinned is as old as the world, takes her home and provides shelter and food.

Ruth's Good Samaritan is known to the police as Violet Benson and vice reports have often contained her name. She, however, manages to hide her scarlet means of obtaining a livelihood from the innocent and grateful Ruth until during one of the regular vice roundups she and Ruth are arrested.

During all this time Ruth's home town and folks have heard nothing of her. The young minister is greatly worried. About the time that Ruth unfortunately becomes the innocent victim caught in the city's vice net, the hypocritical Silas Newton is visiting the same city on business.

Newton attempts to find Ruth but learns of her former landlady that she had moved being unable to pay her board. Later in the day, while reading a paper in his hotel, he finds Ruth's name among the women arrested in the vice raid. He is shocked for a moment but recovers quickly as a villainous scheme enters his mind. His pride still smarting because of Ruth's rejection of his offers of marriage, his perverted nature so long hidden beneath his cloak of hypocrisy, comes to the surface. He conceives of a plan whereby he may take advantage of Ruth in her trouble and obtain revenge for being jilted.

The next morning he goes to the police and sees the weeping, innocent girl who is being treated so cruelly by circumstances arraigned like a common criminal in the prisoners' dock. Ruth tearfully tells her story to the judge who is so impressed by it and her appearance that he discharges her.

At this point Newton steps forward, explains that he is a fellow townsman and agrees to take care of Ruth and see that she gets back to her home safely. Ruth greets his offer of aid trustingly and gratefully. Still hiding his true intentions he takes her to his hotel and secures a room for her. His lust overcomes him after a short time and he forces his way into Ruth's room and forcibly attempts to insult her. She manages to call for help through the telephone and the hotel employees throw Newton out of the place.

Ruth returns to the lodgings she kept with Violet and prepares to pack her belongings and leave. Violet returns while she is engaged in packing and is strangely affected by a photo that Ruth has of her father and stepmother. Violet inquires about the stepmother and then makes a startling revelation.

She tells Ruth that Ruth's stepmother is none other than her own mother also, who, years before she married Ruth's father, had caused her to run away from home due to her unjust and ill-treatment. She tells Ruth of her fight with poverty and misfortune in the city and how she was forced into her life of shame. Ruth believes her and promises to take her home with her to the little village.

Newton, in the meantime filled with the desire to revenge himself upon Ruth for the embarrassment and disgrace she caused him when thrown out of the hotel, comes back to the village with mock surprise and horror, insidiously spreads the story of Ruth's arrest in the city and the charge against her. Like all little towns of its size, the gossip type of male and female predominates and it is not long before the story is being traded from mouth to mouth, embellished with more horrible and sordid details at every telling. It comes to the ears of Ruth's unhappy father and he breaks down with grief and doubt.

The young minister hearing it, is firm in his belief in Ruth and her character, realizes that Newton has some spiteful reason for the scandal he has started and he goes to the city, hunts up Ruth, hears the story of Violet and takes them both back to the village, putting them to live at his own home under the care of his kindly old mother.

The following Sunday, with the congregation in full attendance, anticipating something sensational, he makes the text of his sermon: "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." He scathingly denounces Ruth's

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Near the finish of his sermon he brings the two girls forth from the sacristy and plays his final trump when he clears Ruth's name of the false stain, explains the circumstances that brought shame to Violet and points out the real cause of it all—the stepmother.

Overcome at the sight of Violet, her own daughter, and withered by the minister's scornful attack, the stepmother admits her shortcomings and does public penance.

Violet and Ruth come back to the Hammond home, which afterward became the most popular spot in the village for Pastor Emerson.

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